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Audience with parents of the “Talità kum” Association of Vicenza

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the parents of the *Talità kum* Association of Vicenza.

The following is the Pope’s address, which was read out by Msgr. Filippo Ciampanelli:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I am happy about your visit and I thank you for being here. I greet Fr. Ermes Ronchi, who is accompanying you spiritually.

The first thing I wish to do is look at you in the face, to welcome with open arms your stories marked by suffering, and to offer a caress to your heart, broken and pierced like that of Jesus on the cross: a bleeding heart, a heart bathed in tears and torn apart by a heavy sense of emptiness.

The loss of a child is an experience that does not accept theoretical descriptions and rejects the banality of religious or sentimental words, of sterile encouragement or circumstantial phrases that, while they are intended to console, end up hurting even more those who, like you, face a tough inner battle every day. We must not slip into the attitude of Job’s friends, who offer a pitiful and meaningless spectacle, attempting to justify suffering, even resorting to religious theories. Rather, we are required to imitate the emotion and compassion of Jesus in the face of suffering, that leads Him to live the same sufferings of the world in his own flesh.

Pain, especially when it is so agonizing and without explanation, needs only to cling to the thread of a prayer that cries out to God, day and night, that sometimes expresses itself in the absence of words, that does not attempt to resolve the drama but, on the contrary, inhabits questions that always recur: “Why, Lord? Why did it happen to

me? Why did you not intervene? Where are you, while humanity suffers and my heart mourns an unfathomable loss?”.

Brothers and sisters, these questions, which burn within, trouble the heart; at the same time, though, if we set out, with such courage and also with hardship as you do, it is precisely these same pained questions that open up glimmers of light, that give the strength to keep going. Indeed, there is nothing worse than silencing pain, suppressing suffering, removing trauma without coming to terms with it, as our world often induces us to do, in haste and in a daze. The question that one lifts up to God as a cry is, instead, salutary. It is prayer. Although it forces us to dig into a painful memory and to mourn the loss, at the same time it becomes the first step of invocation and opens one up to receive the consolation and inner peace that the Lord does not fail to give.

The Gospel recounts this to us, in that passage by which you were inspired to give a name to your journey (cf. *Mk* 5:22-43). It narrates the story of a father, the ruler of the synagogue, whose daughter is gravely ill; that man does not stay locked up in his pain, with the risk of giving in to desperation, but runs to Jesus and pleads with Him to come to his house. And the Lord leaves what He was doing and walks with him. Pain calls to Him, because our suffering also pierces God's heart.

There is a poignant detail in this episode: Jesus' walk with that grief-stricken father could be interrupted when the news he did not want to hear comes from home: "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" (v. 35). Jesus could have stopped, opened His arms and said: "There is nothing more to be done". Instead, He says to the man: "Do not fear, only believe" (v. 36) and continues to walk with him, until He enters his house, invaded by death. And, taking the child by the hand, He restores her to life, makes her rise again.

This tells us something important: in suffering, God's first answer is not a discourse or a theory, but it is to walk with us, to stay next to us. Jesus lets Himself be touched by our pain; He travels the same road as us and does not leave us alone, but rather frees us from the burden that oppresses us by carrying it for us and with us. And, as in that episode, the Lord wants to come into our home, the home of our heart and the homes of our families devastated by death: He wants to be close to us, He wants to touch our affliction, He wants to give us His hand to lift us up as He did with the daughter of Jairus.

Brothers, sisters, thank you for making room, in our heart and in your stories, for this Gospel. Jesus who walks with you, Jesus who enters your home and lets Himself be touched by pain and death, Jesus who takes you by the hand to lift you up again. He wants to dry your tears and He wants to reassure you: death does not have the last word. The Lord does not leave us without consolation. If you continue to bring Him your tears and your questions, He gives you an inner certainty that is a source of peace: He makes you grow in the certainty that, with the tenderness of His love, He has taken your children by the hand and said to them too, as He did to the little girl, "*Talitâ kum*, arise!". And He wants to take you by the hand too, so that in the light of the Paschal mystery you may hear His voice that repeats to you too: "Arise, do not lose hope, do not extinguish the joy of living".

And it is beautiful to think that your daughters and your sons, like the daughter of Jairus, have been taken by the hand by the Lord; and that one day you will see them again, you will embrace them again, you will be able to rejoice in their presence in a new light, that no-one will be able to take away from you. Then you will see the cross with the eyes of the resurrection, as it was for Mary and for the Apostles. That hope, which blossomed on Easter morning, is what the Lord wants to sow now in your heart. I hope that you will welcome it, let it grow, cherish it in the midst of your tears. And I would like you to feel not only God's embrace, but also my affection and the closeness of the Church, who loves you and wishes to accompany you.

I hold you in my heart and I assure you of my prayer. You too, please, remember to pray for me. Thank you.
